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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on findings from a 1990-93 PACE (Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience) study concerning the impact of the United Kingdom's Education Reform Act on teachers' professional perspectives and responses to change. Data are drawn from interviews with a national sample of 88 teachers and more intensive classroom study interviews with 9 teachers. The majority of teachers in 1990 felt the impact of the National Curriculum on their work and their role was largely negative, involving more administration, increased planning, and increased stress and anxiety. By 1992 and 1993, these negative feelings had intensified. From 1990 to 1993, an increasing proportion of teachers felt that their strengths and skills and their relationships with children were being eroded by the National Curriculum. However, about one-fifth of teachers saw the National Curriculum as enhancing their skills and providing the opportunity to develop them further. Nearly half the teachers felt a loss of autonomy in pedagogic decision making. A significant minority of teachers felt that a new professionalism involving creative ways of working with children and assessing them was possible, provided they had the confidence to shape the imposed changes to more professionally acceptable ends. Factors which enabled teachers to take control of the changes and selectively adapt them are examined. (Contains 19 references.) (JDD)

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PACE

PRIMARY ASSESSMENT, CURRICULUM AND EXPERIENCE

A study of educational change under the National Curriculum

University of Bristol
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West of England, U.K.

TEACHERS AND THEIR IDEOLOGIES AS MEDIATORS OF CHANGE

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TEACHERS AND THEIR IDEOLOGIES AS MEDIATORS OF CHANGE

This paper reports on findings from the first and second phases of the PACE study carried out between 1990 and 1993 concerning the way in which the multiple innovations resulting from the Education Reform Act were impacting upon teachers' professional perspectives and responses to change. The data presented here are drawn from three rounds of interviews with a national sample of teachers in eight regions of England and three rounds of more intensive 'classroom study' interviews with the nine teachers who were currently teaching our PACE 'study children'.

Teachers are clearly at the centre of all educational provision and the implementation of any new and externally driven policy will inevitably be mediated by the enthusiasm, skills, and practical constraints which characterise every teacher's daily practice. In the case of the introduction of a National Curriculum and national assessment the policy changes imposed on teachers have been particularly problematic since much of the thinking behind the reforms has stemmed from a very different political ideology from that which has characterised educational policy-making and practice in England in the recent past. Not only have teachers been asked to change their daily practice in some quite fundamental ways, they have also been asked to change in ways that for many of them are in conflict with deeply held professional convictions concerning how best to provide for the learning of young children.

Teachers' professional ideologies and their beliefs about classroom practice have complex origins, deriving from a blend of personal biography, training, professional experience, classroom constraints, and national cultural and professional traditions (Pollard 1985, Nias 1989, Acker 1990). The research evidence suggests that, for all the above reasons, prior to the implementation of the Education Reform Act, primary teachers in England saw their role as characterised by teacher autonomy, responsiveness to children's needs, and responsibility for a wide-ranging and diffuse set of goals and priorities which included not only academic objectives, but also the personal and social development of the child. They also encompassed responsibilities inside and outside the classroom including extra-curricular and sometimes even community activities, all aspects of school relationships, and accountability to parents, colleagues and the headteacher. Although, in many ways, teachers were constrained by these responsibilities, they nevertheless believed strongly in their autonomy and saw it as central to their 'extended' role that they be able to define and decide for themselves both what they would teach and how they would teach it (Broadfoot and Osborn 1993).

In the PACE study, one of our concerns was to investigate how far the sweeping and comprehensive change introduced by the Education Reform Act was affecting these deeply held beliefs about the nature of teaching. We were particularly concerned with how teachers perceived their role to be changing and the extent to which they felt that their professional autonomy and personal fulfilment were threatened by the changes. Related to this was the question of how the changes were affecting teachers' relationships with the children in their class, their perceptions of their classroom practice, and their professional relationships with colleagues. At a more theoretical level we were concerned with notions of increasing professionalisation as opposed to notions of 'intensification' and 'deskilling' (Lawn and Ozga 1981, Apple 1986). The argument is succinctly put by Hargreaves (1994) in terms of competing explanations. On the one hand, teachers' roles may be seen to be extended through 'more experiences of whole school development, involvement in collaborative cultures ..., experience of teacher leadership, commitment to continuous improvement, and engagement with processes of extensive school-wide change. In these accounts, teaching is becoming more complex and more skilled.' (Hargreaves 1994, p 117) On the other hand, the intensification thesis is that 'teachers' work is portrayed as becoming routinised and deskilled, ... increasingly controlled by prescribed programs, mandated curricula, and step-by-step methods of instruction'. In addition 'teachers' work has become increasingly intensified, with teachers expected to

respond to greater pressures and comply with multiple innovations ....' (Hargreaves 1994, p 118)

In the sections which follow, this paper investigates the extent to which the teachers in our sample saw themselves as moving from a professional to a technician role, or alternatively, the extent to which they felt able to mediate the changes imposed upon them in order to move towards a new and different type of professionalism.

Changes in teachers' perceptions of work and role

In the three rounds of interviews between 1990 and 1993 with the 88 classroom teachers in our wider sample, we asked teachers to talk in an open-ended way about their role and how it might have changed as a result of the introduction of the National Curriculum and assessment. Nearly two-thirds of the teachers (65%) felt that their role as a teacher had changed to some extent, and for some, these changes were fairly profound.

Although many teachers felt positive about the overall structure provided by the National Curriculum, for the majority of teachers in 1990 the impact of the changes on their work and role was perceived to be largely negative. They mentioned more administration (47%) and increased planning (39%), a loss of spontaneity and child-responsiveness in their teaching (23%), increased stress and anxiety (25%), a strong sense of the imposition of external priorities (20%), and a feeling of loss of autonomy and of creativity (13%). As one teacher put it:

> 'I'm just more stressed now. I feel pulled in different directions and I feel the need to fulfil attainment targets and to cover the core subjects as a constant unspoken pressure. The relaxed atmosphere I used to have in my class is gone. I can't spend so much time with individual children and I don't feel able to respond in a spontaneous way to some initiative introduced by the children. I no longer have the luxury of being responsive and creative.'

These strongly negative feelings were counter-balanced to a limited extent by the positive feelings of those who saw the changes as having the effect of focusing and confirming their instructional role or of leading them towards closer co-operation with colleagues.

By 1992 and 1993, a number of these changes were perceived by teachers to have intensified, in particular the time spent on paperwork and administration, the level of stress and anxiety experienced, and the sense of externally imposed priorities on the teacher. As one Year 2 teacher in 1992 put it:

> 'It's just a different pace. There's a pressure and a feeling that you're never doing enough .... You look at the documents and you think, "How can I possibly fulfil all these demands? How can I fit all this in?" It's just overwhelming sometimes. You feel you're just going through a wheel. You're desperately covering stuff because you must give an assessment for it, and you think, "This is just not what it's about. Learning is not about this and this is not what it should be like."'

A Year 3 teacher, in 1993, argued:

> 'There certainly are more constraints, more pressure on you to produce results, having something to show, some evidence that the children have done it.'

A number of these teachers expressed a feeling that the things which were of central importance to them in teaching were under attack, but they also asserted that they would defend them no matter what. As one teacher argued in 1990:

> 'I am not prepared to become somebody walking round with a checksheet, and I will fight it. ... I think my place is with the children, making a relationship with

> them. It's not fiddling around with bits of paper or spending all my time talking with their parents.'

It was striking that, when asked about their own strengths as a teacher, 75% in 1990 emphasised affective skills such as being good at developing relationships with children, colleagues and parents, compared with only 34% who mentioned classroom management skills. Yet at the same time, 48% of teachers perceived management skills to be of increasing importance under the National Curriculum. It is not surprising therefore that 22% felt that their strengths and skills were being eroded by the National Curriculum. Thus one teacher argued that
to be a good teacher:

> 'It's got to be first of all an ability to have a good relationship with children, to be able to encourage, cajole them into working hard, to be lively, full of fun, to provide a stimulating environment where they want to come to school and they want to learn. Some of one's spontaneity gets dampened by the rigorous demands of the National Curriculum. Some of the very special times in a primary classroom are when you just respond spontaneously to children's ideas. There is not much time or scope for that now.'

By 1992, far more teachers emphasised cognitively related teaching skills (58% compared with 24%) as a strength, although in other ways their perceptions of their own strengths were little changed. What is more, an increasing proportion of teachers (50% compared with 22%) felt that their strengths and skills were being eroded by the National Curriculum.

While many teachers were clearly not happy with the early impact of the changes on their work, it seems that less than a quarter felt strongly enough in 1990 to see this in terms of 'deskilling'. However, by 1992, virtually half the teachers had some perception of being 'deskilled' and this perception continued in 1993.

Into this description of professional concern, we should note that, throughout the period of the research, there remained a proportion of teachers (around one-fifth) who saw the National Curriculum as complementing and enhancing their skills and strengths or providing the opportunity to develop them further. As one teacher put it:

> 'The National Curriculum has been useful in giving us targets and a framework to work within. In a way, it's a bit reassuring. It gives me a focus and another reason for doing things. It helps me feel as though I'm on the right track and releases me to work out new ways of teaching.'

These teachers felt positively about processes of reviewing and reflecting on their practice which the National Curriculum had made necessary. They also believed that it had raised awareness among teachers of the importance of providing progression and continuity for children. Similarly, the need to read more widely and to collaborate more closely with other teachers was perceived as an enhancement of their professionalism. It is significant that this proportion of teachers persisted in seeing positive outcomes for their teaching, indicating that there were still strong glimmerings of hope of a new 'emergent' professionalism deriving from teachers' handling of the changes.

To summarise, while there had been a noticeable shift towards perceptions of deskilling amongst teachers by 1992 and 1993, some teachers still felt empowered by the changes, even while suffering from the results of curriculum overload.

Professional autonomy and personal fulfilment

Although at the onset of the implementation of the Education Reform Act it was apparent that the imposition of a National Curriculum would reduce the individual teacher's freedom to choose the 'content' of the curriculum, it was not so clear to what extent it might affect their freedom over how they taught. For example, it was argued by Hargreaves (1988) that having less responsibility for deciding curriculum content would release teachers' energies to engage in developing new pedagogic approaches. Others, however, have argued that external pressures would compel teachers to change their teaching methods (Osborn and Broadfoot 1990).

Nearly half the teachers interviewed in 1992 felt a loss of autonomy in their pedagogic decision-making following the advent of the National Curriculum, and saw it as to some extent eroding professional judgement. A large number of teachers talked of a loss of freedom and creativity in their teaching, of feeling increasingly like 'a machine for delivering a prescribed curriculum', as well as the loss of a career structure, and of the feeling of doing a valued and worthwhile job. This feeling continued in 1993, yet at the same time a significant minority of teachers in all three years continued to speak of the positive effect of having a structure and guidelines to work within. This, they felt, released them to be creative in the way they worked with individual children rather than worry about whether they had covered what should be covered. As one Year 2 teacher in 1992 put it:

> 'I feel that at least now there is some guideline as to what you should have achieved in the amounts of time that you have had with children .... Up till now I have always felt that in teaching I'm not doing enough. I could always be doing more, which I think every teacher feels. Things were so open that you could never feel you had done a good job.'

Such feelings of uncertainty and anxiety among primary teachers prior to the implementation of the National Curriculum were not uncommon. Indeed, several previous researchers have pointed to the insecurity experienced by individual teachers about whether they were covering the right things or whether they ought to have been doing more (Nias 1989, Broadfoot and Osborn 1988). Another teacher in the PACE study talked of the 'vulnerability' of teachers prior to the National Curriculum when:

> 'You had very little framework, you were very much left to yourself to decide what's to do and I think that is quite hairy really when you look back'.

As a result of this previous uncertainty, the majority of teachers (68%) welcomed the structure and guidelines introduced by the National Curriculum, although not its over-prescriptive nature, the rapid pace at which the changes were introduced, nor the sheer volume of work and pressure which resulted.

As one teacher of a mixed Year 3/4 class argued in 1993:

> 'We're more accountable for what we're doing now than in the past. We don't have the same personal autonomy we once had. At the same time our role has been more clearly defined now. It's probably a clearer route through to professionalism now than in the past. We've got a clearer idea of what we are being asked to do.'

When we talked in more depth to our nine classroom study teachers over the three rounds of interviews between 1990 and 1993, it was clear that for some of these teachers, the satisfactions derived from teaching were ebbing away while the frustrations were increasing.

For example, in 1992 the Year 2 teacher in one of our classroom study schools, St Anne's, felt very strongly:

> 'I can see no bright areas of the job whatsoever. Even the simple pleasures of seeing children achieve things. It's more a case of, "Oh well, I can cross that off my list, mark that box," and it's not a personal development shared between two people. It's just another task out of the way. It's becoming easier in a sense because you start the day, you know exactly what you're going to do, but then one of the joys as well as one of the nightmares of infant teaching was you didn't know how the day was going to develop ....'

At that time this teacher felt that he would not now choose teaching as a job:

> 'which is a shame because at times I've enjoyed it. I've realised that I'm good at it, and I've sort of found out what I was meant to be, and it's very disheartening that I'm not allowed to enjoy what I'm doing any more. But, having said that, you know, when I wake up in the morning and think, "Would I rather go to work in a library, would I rather go to work in an office, would I rather go to work in a school?" School comes down last on the list.'

However, by 1993, this teacher, who had moved up with his class as they became Year 3 children, was beginning to feel slightly more relaxed in his teaching and more confident that he could deliver the National Curriculum in a way that fitted with his professional concerns:

> 'Although my approach to teaching has become more formalised, structured and strictured, I find I am beginning to be able to relax more since last year. By becoming more thematic I've been able to cover a lot of attainment targets. In science, for example, we did "changes". I managed to cover language, science, geography, maths and cookery, but the National Curriculum doesn't tell you you can do this. You have to think it out. There's no specific advice on what can be done thematically.'

As the National Curriculum became more accepted, two of the other classroom teachers interviewed in 1992 also found that the sense of constraint they had experienced had begun to lessen as they became more familiar with the National Curriculum and had the confidence to deviate from it where they felt it appropriate. For example, the Lawnside Year 2 teacher argued:

> 'Now, I don't necessarily think, "Oh, I shouldn't do that." I don't feel the restraint in that sense now. I don't feel that it's wrong to go off onto something which maybe has been inspired by the children, whereas before (ie in the first few months of the National Curriculum) I used to think, "I don't have time to do that." ... I'm not so frightened at going off on a tangent now. I feel as long as it's worthwhile ... that the children can get as much from going off the topic for a while. ... So much is covered over and over again. Practically everything is repetition in different ways.'

For this teacher, rather than a lessening of enjoyment and fulfilment in work, there had merely been a change in the gains she felt. She now derived satisfaction from working out new creative ideas for meeting the National Curriculum requirements.

> 'Personally, I find it very stimulating because I look at documents and I look at the things that are required and I try to think of ideas and ways of doing things that meet the requirement. ... I find it very challenging to work within a frame but at the same time I want to be free to go outside it to some degree if I think it's worthwhile.'

A second teacher, working in the inner city context of Meadway Infant School also argued that:

'Before, I felt our goals were becoming woolly and that we had run out of steam with the child-centred approach. ... As long as I can continue my way of working and implement the National Curriculum as I see fit .... Sometimes it's (the National Curriculum) easy to assimilate and sometimes difficult. It (the National Curriculum) as a whole is welcome but it's hard work.'

These teachers' responses suggest again that some teachers were gaining the confidence to interpret and actively mediate the National Curriculum in ways which suited their own professional ends. They were struggling constructively with their work overload. In rationalising and prioritising their goals, they were making decisions which enabled them to cope creatively, albeit selectively, with the changes.

Collaboration with colleagues

When we asked our classroom study teachers how the reforms were influencing their relationships with colleagues, most confirmed that there had been considerable changes in the way they worked both with colleagues and with the headteacher.

Three key themes in teachers' conversation about working with colleagues were those of 'co-operation', 'support', and 'awareness'. All 27 teachers over the three rounds of classroom studies felt that, as a result of the National Curriculum, they were co-operating and working more closely with colleagues and this was usually seen to be a positive outcome, and to give 'a feeling of ownership and sharing. It makes us feel that we are planning towards the common good.' At the same time, they were far more aware of the work colleagues were doing in their classrooms and of the need to avoid repetition and to ensure continuity and progression for children.

As the Year 1 teacher at Kenwood put it:

> 'Now we have a lot more staff meetings when curriculum leaders talk about curriculum areas. We all go on the latest courses .... We have in-service days regularly. There is an increase in working together. Last year we visited each other in classrooms and we ask each other for help a lot more often now.'

The Year 2 teacher at Orchard Primary School said:

> 'We always have worked closely together but we are doing so even more now. We're discussing our own topics together far more and making sure too that we're not all covering the same thing, and we're very much more aware that we're planning to cover the whole of the curriculum.'

In one of the schools, collaboration between teachers had often taken the form of supporting one another to resist aspects of the National Curriculum, which were felt to be inappropriate for inner city children. These teachers, with the tacit support of the Head, saw themselves as 'conspirators' working together to implement the National Curriculum selectively in a way which they felt would protect the children and avoid overload. For example, a decision had been made in 1992 to ignore the history and geography programmes of study except where they 'fitted naturally' into topics planned for the core subjects.

There was considerable evidence from the classroom studies and from the larger round of teacher interviews in 1992 and 1993 that teachers were moving towards a more 'collaborative professional' stance, although this mainly involved a substantial increase in

planning together and had not yet begun to take the form of shared teaching or more subject specialism.

However, there are some limitations on viewing the whole school planning approach as a move towards real collegiality (Wallace 1989, Warren-Little 1987,). Enforced or 'contrived' collegiality can sometimes lead to a lack of ownership in the planned work and hence a loss of interest and spontaneity (Stone 1993, Hargreaves 1992). On the whole however, most of the teachers welcomed the increase in collaboration and partnership with colleagues and felt that it added a new dimension to their professionalism. It would not be putting the case too strongly to argue that there was a definite move towards a more 'collaborative professionalism' (Hoyle 1992).

Perceptions of change in classroom practice

In our three larger rounds of interviews with 88 teachers across the country, we asked about teachers' classroom practice and how this was being affected by the National Curriculum and assessment.

One notable feature of these data is the fact that the vast majority of teachers, over 70%, believed they adopted 'mixed' teaching methods. Even in 1990, only one fifth subscribed exclusively to forms of 'child-centred' pedagogy, a fact that somewhat belies the sensationalism about progressivism which has sometimes filled the English media in recent years. One teacher, whose response was fairly typical said:

> 'I try to be a co-learner with the children, I try to increase my skills and be a more reflective teacher and I try to use the principles of really looking at the children's work and following through the stages in their learning.'

However, by 1992 there was a significant fall in the number of teachers declaring themselves to have child-centred approaches and a corresponding increase in those who described themselves as 'traditional' or 'formal'.

When we asked the teachers to clarify these descriptions of their classroom practice, there was a dramatic change apparent between 1990 and 1992. For instance, there was a fall in teachers mentioning forms of integrated day from 29% to 8%, and a rise in teachers mentioning whole-class teaching from 4% to 29%. Both these changes are highly significant statistically. A continuity in emphasis on group work and on the curriculum 'basics' was also notable, whilst there was no perceived decrease in the prominence of topic work. The latter finding somewhat contradicts the patterns found through our classroom observation but this may reflect continuing attempts to provide integrated work despite the difficulty of actually doing it.

Lest the origins of such changes be doubted, over 85% of the teachers interviewed in 1992 attributed them to the introduction of the National Curriculum whilst 55% identified new assessment requirements. Only 12% spoke of other changes in school and just 3% mentioned personal sources of change. The 1990 figures were very similar. The teacher quoted above cited particularly the demands made by the National Curriculum in terms of classroom management:

> 'I'm finding that the demand of organising and managing the children has changed a tremendous amount. I'm trying to maximise on time.'

This perceived change in teaching approach and philosophy was also reflected in changes in classroom practice. Most teachers (87%) felt that the advent of the National Curriculum had resulted in significant changes to their working day and for 38% in 1990 and no less than 62% in 1992 these changes were seen as major. The most important areas of change involved more time spent on assessment-related record keeping, with over 60% mentioned

this in both rounds of interviews, and more time spent on planning and preparation, with this being mentioned by over 40% on both occasions.

Even in 1990 there was certainly evidence for the 'intensification' of teachers' work (in the sense of chronic work overload) (Apple 1986, Lawn and Ozga 1981) with many teachers either having to work longer hours or having to work in a more concentrated, less relaxed way in order to get through their workload. There was a general feeling of being swamped by change. 'Too much has happened too quickly,' was the way many teachers put it. While they were developing new ways of working, particularly in the area of record-keeping and assessment, more information would arrive which superseded it, meaning that they had wasted their time. For example, keeping up with the documentation which accompanied the National Curriculum was seen by most as 'simply overwhelming'. 'Far too much to assimilate. I have just had to give up on it for the time being,' as one teacher put it.

Many teachers expressed frustration and even anger over the amount of time which was apparently demanded by NCC and SEAC for record-keeping and assessment. There were fears that this was beginning to 'take over from teaching', that the heavy burden demanded in time and effort left too little time for planning, for responding to children, for display work, for all the things which were seen by many as 'real teaching'.

In 1992, the pressure on teachers was clearly immense and nearly one quarter were beginning to change their teaching methods in order to be able to cope. However, the need to spend such major amounts of time on assessment and on meetings appeared to have declined, presumably because teachers felt that they had come to terms to some extent with the demands of the SATs and the National Curriculum. One teacher argued:

> 'I have to put in far more hours than the 1265 hours designated in order to fulfil the needs of the National Curriculum and really the 1265 hours which we're supposed to spend on things in addition to preparation and marking is really extremely questionable. Most teachers are now getting up very early in the morning and finishing very late at night. As a class teacher you need to be in school by a quarter to eight and you need to not leave school before five or six each evening and in addition to that you need to do between two and three hours of work at home and you're still not finished. I certainly spend, I would say, about five or six hours at the week-end, so the 1265 hours really does not address that at all. Because even with doing that amount of work most class teachers feel very much under stress and unable to cope with the workload.'

In 1993, this tightening of teacher control was ever more in evidence. As the Year 3 teacher at Orchard described it:

> 'I'm far more dictatorial in my approach. There's definitely less sort of "laissez faire", I would say ... in the classroom, and I do state far more what the children must do rather than giving them the opportunity to choose and develop activities as they would want to do. I think that means that I'm putting far more of my own emphasis on what they should learn and it's <u>not</u> coming from them. Now a lot of the children are not rebelling at all against that but with assessment, particularly, I've felt that they've really got a little bit bogged down with worksheets, photocopied material and that sort of thing and it becomes more difficult to find an alternative approach. I now have very much more teacher speaking, child listening and regurgitating what was said.'

We thus have clear signs, from teacher accounts, of tighter classroom structures, tighter teacher control and heavier workloads in response to the National Curriculum and assessment. In the next section we consider how the tightening of 'frame' and the increased pressure experienced by teachers was felt to be influencing teacher relationships with the children in their class.

Relationships between teachers and children

In 1990 only 31% of the teachers felt that the National Curriculum had a negative effect on teachers' relationships with children. By 1992 this proportion had increased to 58%, partly as a result of the impact of the introduction of National Assessment, but in particular because of a perceived increase in pressure on teachers' time leaving them less relaxed and less able to spend time responding to children. Most teachers had strong feelings about the importance of defending their relationship with the children, feelings which were closely tied to their own sense of identity as primary teachers (Nias 1989).

Time and again they mentioned the National Curriculum as a definite pressure on the relaxed relationships they had formerly had with children. Contributing to this was the loss of fun and responsiveness to children in their teaching and the feeling of a need to justify everything in terms of the attainment targets. In 1990 one teacher argued:

> 'There isn't anything that you do now that you don't feel, "Can you actually justify this, what educational guide are the children getting out of it, how can you tie it up with an attainment target or programme of study?" all that sort of thing. Or can you, like you used to be able to, just do it for the pure fun and enjoyment of it?'

This feeling of pressure was almost universal amongst the teachers we interviewed. The Valley Year 1 teacher agreed:

> 'I think on a bad day I'm definitely more "crabby" because I do feel under pressure all the time. When the children do something, instead of looking at it and thinking only "Has this child tried hard, is this good for this child?" I'm thinking, "Does it fulfil certain criteria?" And if it doesn't, my anxiety ... shows through. I think because of the pressures at the moment I'll be more likely not to have been so nice and loving as might have been'.

Closely related to this was a sense of loss of the close, affective ties many teachers had developed with the children in their class. As a teacher put it:

> 'I think there is a tendency to be so pressurised by the demands of the National Curriculum that there isn't so much time to spend discussing emotional and personal issues with the children. It's, "Right, let's get on. Tell me about it later." And those issues are just as important as the more academic issues .... So much of the very nice aspects of being with the children have been lost. And I think the children feel it. I feel they feel very tired and pressurised at the end of the half term.'

The feeling of stress and a loss of relaxed, enjoyable time with the children seemed, if anything, to have intensified between 1990 and 1993. As the Year 3 teacher at Audley Primary put it in 1993:

> 'I think that you feel always that you've got to urge them on, that there's a big hurry involved because there's so much to get through and so little time, and therefore whereas you would have given them time, more time to carry on with something that they were deeply involved with and enthusiastic about, there's something at the back of your mind all the time saying, 'Oh well, we can only allow so many hours to do this, we've got to move on,' and therefore you can become ... irritable, if you hurry(?), because some children are lagging behind and slowing things up. I think this happens subconsciously.

Another Year 3 teacher agreed:

> 'Well, I notice that there isn't so much time to sit with the children perhaps at the beginning of each session, talking about their week-end, their holiday, perhaps objects which they have brought in from home. There wouldn't be time because you feel the enormous pressure of the workload you've got to get through.'

Such feelings were intensified where teachers felt there was a particularly strong conflict between the demands of the National Curriculum and the needs of the children. The Year 1 teacher at St. Anne's working in a socially disadvantaged area in the North of England, felt a conflict between,

> '... knowing the kind of work you should be doing and which the National Curriculum encompasses and the restrictions imposed by the kind of children they are. I feel that I'm not able perhaps to take things as far as I would like, it has to be a very simple level, sometimes I'd like to take it one step further and I'm not able to do that.'

In 1990 there was evidence of a strong determination amongst teachers not to allow the changes to destroy their relationship with the children and this protectiveness was still strongly in evidence in teachers' responses in later years. As the Year 2 teacher at Valley put it:

> 'When I feel those frictions I lay off the National Curriculum. When I feel those I say, "I don't care, we will do something completely different," and I change my tack, and I go back to being Viv Jones, the "proper" teacher and I don't care. Margaret (the Head) backs me up on this. When I feel those tensions come back into the classroom I stand back. I make an assessment, make a sensible judgement, and think, "Enough's enough."'

In spite of the perceived pressures, the responses of these teachers expressed a determination to try to protect their relationship with the children and to mediate the demands of the reforms to acceptable professional ends.

Summary and Conclusions

The evidence presented here suggests that even at an early stage in the implementation of the reforms most teachers felt that they had to change their teaching approach, their classroom practice and their perception of their professional role in ways which they would not have chosen for themselves. This resulted in pressures from lack of time, an intensification of workload, and a loss of job satisfaction. By 1992 and 1993 there were increasing perceptions of a loss of autonomy and fulfilment in teaching. Teachers described themselves as feeling more controlled and less autonomous. Thus, on the face of it, the data appear to support the intensification thesis. However, this impression does not fully take into account teachers' capacity to take charge of events, and to mediate change rather than simply to respond to it. A significant minority of teachers felt that a new professionalism involving creative ways of working with individual children and of assessing them was possible provided they had the confidence to shape the imposed changes to more professionally acceptable ends. As Hargreaves (1992) demonstrates, this emergent perception of a 'new professionalism' cannot simply be dismissed as 'false consciousness' on the part of teachers.

Out of the unpromising beginnings represented by the imposition of a National Curriculum and Assessment, some teachers had found creative ways of teaching and many had moved towards new ways of collaborating with colleagues. Often this was evident only at the planning stage of work and there were limits to its effectiveness, but it nevertheless represents an important move towards a new 'collaborative' professionalism.

About one fifth of the teachers we interviewed consistently saw some positive outcomes for their professionalism and for their teaching as a result of the reforms. We have called such teachers 'mediators' who were able to take ownership and control of the innovations and to work to develop new forms of practice in pedagogy and assessment while building on what they felt to be good about their existing practice. One example of such a teacher was a Deputy Head who argued that the National Curriculum facilitated his role as a manager as well as a classroom teacher:

> 'It's a powerful lever for me in getting things done in school. It would be a harder struggle without the National Curriculum in getting any change. I use it as an enhancer for what I want to do anyway. It's an enhancing process because it forces us to be clearer about what we want to do. It gives a clearer focus to work.'

Some teachers saw particularly positive outcomes in terms of the emphasis placed by the National Curriculum on collaboration between teachers and on the need for teachers to reflect upon and review their practice. A number felt that the changes had helped to focus and confirm their role.

One Year 2 teacher argued that the National Curriculum released teachers from anxiety and vulnerability,

> '... because you've got a framework and you've got a reference, and provided it's used as a tool, which I think perhaps we do here, it can actually release you ... you can relax more because you know that you've got things keyed in at the planning stage ... You can focus much more in depth on areas ... provided that you use it as a tool, and you don't change what you believe is the best way children learn ...'

Another argued that as a result of the National Curriculum standards would be pushed up in primary schools, leaving secondary education with less to do:

> 'Like the science we've been doing over the last couple of years, we've been doing some of the work that would have been done in the first two years of secondary schools, so there ought to be things rebounding off it. Standards should be going up. I think the children are going to be better prepared.'

So far as collaborative work was concerned, a Year 3 teacher in a suburban junior school described how she and her colleagues had evolved their own pattern:

> 'In Year 3, it has become our style to work as a Year Group. We three (all Year 3 teachers) all get on well. One plans history and produces a work-plan and then we all do it. Someone else plans craft. One of us will read to the children while the others go off and plan a visit. it all works very well indeed.'

Also, in 1993, the Year 3 teacher at Kenwood argued that:

> '... in that way the National Curriculum has been quite beneficial because I think it has made teachers come together to try and work on schemes of work, to work together much more. In this school particularly, that has been quite a benefit.'

What were the factors which enabled teachers to take control of the changes in this way and to selectively modify and adapt them? There are many variables at both institutional and individual level which may influence a teacher's stance towards change. Among these are the school ethos and strategy for change, the socio-economic catchment area of the school, and the teacher's ideology and previous beliefs about teaching. For example, Bowe et al (1989) argued that schools which are already well adapted to making changes, and where a collaborative culture has been fostered, are in a better position to make a 'creative'

response to change which will involve and support the staff. There was some evidence from our interviews with classroom teachers that teachers who had perceived themselves as strongly child-centred, creative, and spontaneous in their approach were those who often felt they had the most to lose under the National Curriculum, and were, as a consequence, less positive about it.

Conscientiousness, or even over-conscientiousness may be an issue too. Campbell et al (1991) cite such internalised commitment to high personal standards as a factor in teacher stress and consequent demoralisation, because it made it difficult for teachers to limit their workload. In contrast, some teachers had developed coping strategies which enabled them to constrain impulses to over-conscientiousness in order to protect their personal time, social life and their 'sanity'. For some of the teachers in our study, the ability to adopt such a stance enabled them to make a more positive, creative response to the National Curriculum by exercising choice and rationing and prioritising the workload.

Some of these teachers, like those identified by Fullan (1991) as 'interactors' or by McCallum et al (1993) as 'systematic planners', were able to make a conscious decision about how to proceed rather than allowing themselves to be 'swamped by change'. Very often, variables at the institutional level made it possible to take this stance.

For example, schools in different types of socio-catchment area experienced very different pressures as a result of the changes, and consequently their teachers often expressed a different set of concerns and anxieties. Thus, in many schools in disadvantaged inner-city areas, anxiety centred on the difficulty of adapting teaching to the perceived needs of the individual children. The National Curriculum was not seen as relating well to the children's needs. It was felt that there was a need for time in order to allow infant- school children to adapt to classroom life and to become ready to learn, and that this time was no longer available under the pressures of the National Curriculum. As one inner-city teacher put it:

> 'There are social and economic difficulties here. You can't start where you would hope to. You have to start building up closeness to the child first. If you don't do that you might as well not bother. I'd hate to get to the point where I think, "I must do that today and I'm sorry if Emma comes in crying, but she's just got to sit and do it, because the law says I must be doing it."'

In 1992, 62% of teachers in inner-city schools expressed the view that the demands of the National Curriculum took no account of the real classroom situation, compared with 43% of teachers in affluent, middle-class areas and 21% of rural teachers. More inner-city teachers also felt that the National Curriculum was unsuited to special needs children, and more teachers from the inner-city (94%) and from settled working-class areas (82%) thought that, in the future, primary education would be less able to adapt to children's needs, compared with 73% of teachers in middle-class areas and 60% of rural teachers. Because of their situation, and the very real constraints under which they operated, these teachers often adopted coping strategies similar to those of the 'autonomous' teachers identified by Fullan (1992) who 'cannot be forced to be involved and may very well be doing a good job'. They were often likely to articulate their position in terms of responding to the needs of the children and protecting children's interests.

Teachers in affluent middle-class catchment areas were the most likely to see the changes as enhancing their teaching qualities and skills in terms of enabling them to reflect on their practice (33% of teachers in middle-class areas compared with 11% of inner-city teachers) and collaborate with other teachers (47% and 4% respectively). Those teaching in rural and in middle-class areas were also more likely to perceive the National Curriculum as enabling them to provide greater continuity and progression for children.

Teachers in the inner-city had very justifiable concerns about the financial effects of LMS, about the publication of league tables of standardised assessment results and the effect of

such comparisons with schools in more advantaged areas. These, they felt, could in no way take into account the progress individual children had made or the enormous efforts made by teachers. Comparisons in the media, which began to emerge over the period of data gathering, were perceived by many teachers as demoralising and insulting to both staff and children. Such findings suggest that as the effects of the educational market continue to operate, and teaching in the inner-city becomes a harder and less rewarding job, the eventual outcome might be a flight of teachers from the inner-city schools to 'easier', more affluent areas as often occurs in France as a primary teacher's career develops. This could mean a considerable loss to inner-city children of committed, confident and experienced teachers.

All these factors apart, the teachers who felt able to make a creative response to the National Curriculum were those who felt confident and sure enough about their own practice to enable them to make choices and to be selective in how they implemented the programmes of study. They were often supported by a strong, collaborative school culture. Their responses were characterised by a confidence that they could benefit from the structure and guidelines of the National Curriculum without letting it drive them or destroy what they knew to be good about their practice. Further examples of such teachers' beliefs and, classroom practice are given in the PACE book *Changing English Primary Schools*.

While only about one fifth of the teachers in our sample could be described as 'mediators' there were many more, in fact a majority, who welcomed the guidelines and structure provided by the National Curriculum. Indeed, it is likely that if such teachers had not been swamped by the sheer pace of change, and if they had been given an opportunity to take ownership of the innovations, 'mediation' and creative response to the changes might have been the predominant response. Most of teachers' disillusion related to the pace of change, the nature of recording and assessments, and, at later stages, to the overcrowded nature of the curriculum.

If, as seems almost certain, the current Dearing review of the curriculum and assessment requirements results in a reduction of workload, many more teachers may feel able to make a positive and creative response to educational reform (Dearing 1993). Thus, in spite of the pressures and the generally inept central management of the introduction of the Education Reform Act, our later findings suggest that there was a continuing potential for constructive professionalism. Some teachers still saw a way through the changes to some growth and development in their practice. They envisaged the possibility of a movement forward, after previous uncertainty, to a new clarity about their role.

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